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ABSTRACT

The New York City Teaching Fellows (NYCTF) program was established in August 2000 as an alternative certification program to try to fill the void for certified teachers in SURR (Schools Under Registration Review) schools, since a disproportionate number of teachers at SURR schools are not certified. To evaluate the success of the program, a questionnaire was sent to 46 fellows at Lehman College to explore their motivations for pursuing teaching, determine their greatest difficulties and successes as teachers, and examine how they received their major support and how useful they found their evening education classes. Additionally, they were asked how, if given the opportunity, they would improve their jobs and where they envisioned themselves in 10 years. Respondents were also asked to give their three major reasons for remaining teachers and whether they intended to continue teaching at a SURR school. In summary, the responses and their analysis indicate that the NYCTF program is an unqualified success at producing certified teachers; however, it is unlikely that it will reduce the problem of teacher turnover and lack of certified teachers at SURR schools, since 90 percent of the respondents are already considering teaching in non-SURR and suburban schools or leaving the field altogether upon completion of permanent teacher certification. (Contains 24 references.) (SM)

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ED 467 756

Evaluation of the NYCTF Program as an Alternative Certification Program

Judith Stein

Abstract

The NYC Teaching Fellows program was established August, 2000 as an alternative certification program to try to fill the void for certified teachers in SURR schools, since a disproportionate number of teachers at SURR schools are not certified. To evaluate the success of the program, a questionnaire was sent to 46 Fellows at Lehman College to explore their motivations for pursuing teaching, determine their greatest difficulties and successes as teachers, how they received their major support and how useful they found their evening education classes. Additionally, they were asked how, if given the opportunity, they would improve their jobs, and where they envisioned themselves in ten years. Respondents were also asked to give their three major reasons for remaining teachers and whether they intended to continue teaching at a SURR school.

In summary, the responses and their analysis indicate that the NYCTF Program is an unqualified success at producing certified teachers; however, it is unlikely that it will reduce the problem of teacher turnover and lack of certified teachers at SURR schools, since 90% of the respondents are already considering teaching in non-SURR and suburban schools, or leaving the field altogether, upon completion of permanent teacher certification

Basic History of the Fellows Program

In the summer of 2000, the new Chancellor of New York City Public Schools, Mr. Harold Levy, proposed the NYCTF program, which is appropriate since Chancellor Levy himself began his career in the world of business, not education. In July of 2000, the program received approval by Richard Mills of the Commission of Education and the New York State Board of Regents as an alternative pathway to teaching, as well as an expedited funding for a $25 million teacher recruitment package. Simultaneously, the Board of regents threatened Levy with a lawsuit if he continued to allow unlicensed teachers to work in designated S.U.R.R. schools. (Keller,2000)

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(Keller,2000)

Killing Two Birds with One Stone

The teacher shortage was immediately threatening NYC Schools, especially those where academic performance was well below the norm. First, there was a projected shortfall of approximately 7000 teachers for the fall term 2000; furthermore, the large number of teachers exiting the city's public schools was not likely to abate and projections of shortages of 25,000 teachers over the next several years were made. (McAdoo, 2000).

Second, a third of city teachers were uncertified teachers as compared to 20%uncertified in the state as a whole. (Keller,2000) As a result, the State Board of Regents had stepped up licensing requirements for all teachers, and barred the hiring of any unlicensed teachers after 2003. Since a disproportionate number of uncertified teachers taught in the sub par SURR Schools, the Teaching Fellows Program was expected to alleviate both the teacher shortage, and, by selecting candidates with high academic achievement, and placing them in a rigorous masters of education program, immediately giving them part 1 and 2 of the certification test, the Teaching Fellows Program would hopefully provide a source of well-educated, certified classroom teachers who could be placed into directly into positions in SURR Schools.

The First Bird

The first problem, the projected shortfall of 7000 teachers, was based on estimates of three populations: those teachers who would retire, those who routinely leave teaching positions in the city for more lucrative positions in nearby suburbs, and a third group, "the revolving door teachers," who leave teaching altogether.

Different factors motivate each of these groups to leave their teaching positions. The first group is fully vested in their pension and eager to retire from a job that has become increasingly frustrating and unrewarding. Many potential retirees were just waiting to see the new contract in 2000, and still are.

The second group is lured into suburban Long Island, Westchester, and New Jersey, by the chance to earn far better pay, as well as the opportunity to face students who are often far more interested in learning than many of the city's students. New York City school teachers are paid 20-30% less than their suburban peers, (Stamatis, 2001) and the inequity is greatest for new teachers. (Stamatis, 2001) In New York City, where the cost of living is quite high, a starting

teachers. (Stamatis, 2001) In New York City, where the cost of living is quite high, a starting teacher, under the old November 2000 contract that is still in effect, will take home $31,900 before a myriad of mandatory deductions. The deductions themselves are not always equitable, such as the $30 monthly UFT fees, which is the same for teachers of all salary levels. (New York City Salary Differentials)

Furthermore, many suburbs have wisely enable experienced NYC teachers to transfer to their school systems without losing any seniority or retirement benefits. Thus, these bedroom communities have the pick of all the new graduate teachers as well as the ability to hand pick the best experienced city teachers in scarce areas such as math or science. Jacobsen does the simple yet elegant analysis between changes in a school districts regional entry salary ranking and teacher recruitment in both poor regions of N.Y. State and in wealthy Nassau County. (Jacobsen, 1989) It should surprise no one that he found a direct correlation between the level of the entry salary and the ability to attract the most highly educated candidates. (Jacobsen, 1989)

The third group of teachers who exit the profession altogether is an enormous but elusive problem. Professor Richard Ingersoll's study of new teacher turnover showed that the rate of turnover in NYC (25% within 3 years and 42% within 6 years) has created a recruitment crisis (Ingersoll, 2001). Nationally, the five-year quit rate is 30%, an improvement over New York City, but hardly an encouraging statistic. Ingersoll looked at the problem from the vantage point of school organization and determined that the four main complaints were inadequate support from school administration, student discipline problems, limited teacher input into school decision making and low salaries. (Ingersoll, 2001)

Bole's and Troen's findings support those of Ingersoll. They argue that teachers quit because of the nature of the schools and the job of the teacher, both legacies of 19th century industrial style origins, with principals viewed as bosses and teachers as replaceable as assembly line workers. Ultimately, this dynamic has created a school culture that stymies all attempts at reforms. (Boles and Troen, 2000) They feel motivated teachers need better career options and opportunites for professional growth, yet teachers who try to improve their performance get little support.

> "But don't blame the teachers. Blame the job. Teaching is a flat career that offers promotions and raises almost exclusively on years of service and academic degree. There are few external incentives or rewards for acquiring knowledge, sharpening skills, or improving

> performance. Too often, teaching is a dead-end job with low status, uncompetitive salaries and poor working conditions. (Boles and Troen, p.59)

Killing Two Birds with One Stone:

Bird #2 (The Lack of Certified Teachers in SURR Schools)

If these are general research findings, job frustration must be greatly magnified by the situation in NYC SURR schools, where the environment tends to make teaching difficult and frustrating. Indeed, as mentioned above, the Teaching Fellows Program was created, not only to alleviate the general teacher shortage but to provide a source of certified teachers for SURR Schools with higher retention rates.

The State Education Department developed the program of S.U.R.R. (Schools under Registration Review) schools. To qualify as a SURR school, at least 60 % of the students at a school must be below standards in literacy and math. In reality, the levels of sub performance at these schools is often closer to 90% below standards in literacy and math. (Viteritti and Kosar, 2000). The State Education Department's focus on these failing institutions can be seen as part of a larger effort to raise standards across the board and to hold schools accountable for the performance of their students. When a school makes the state SURR list, it is required to develop an improvement plan and is closely monitored by the State Education Department. Supposedly a school is given three years to demonstrate improvement or it is shut down. Although these guidelines give the impression that strong intervention and rapid turnaround occurs, the true facts are more sobering. The average school lingers on the SURR list for five years and about nine years pass before a school is forced to close. Most of the school removed from the list because they have improved are, according to test scores, failing institutions. Furthermore, the schools on the list in the first place are only those with a history of low academic performance, "the proverbial tip of the iceberg." (Viteritti and Kosar, 2000, p.2)

In 1996, the NYC Board of Education created a Chancellor's District 85, encompassing 55 schools from the SURR list. These schools were provided longer school days, and smaller class sizes, with the hope that such special attention would reverse their desperate course. In April of this year, nine schools will be returned to their own district while seven others will join the Chancellor's District, and five of the nine schools that have been returned to their home districts have also been removed from the SURR list altogether. A review of student

performance shows notable improvements at the schools taken from the Chancellor's District; however, the same evidence shows that these schools are a long way from the standards set by the state as a measure of adequacy. (Viteritti and Kosar, 2000)

In summary, academic failure in New York City is widespread and condoned, unfortunately the norm rather than the exception. 98 of 114 SURR schools in New York State are in the five boroughs. Previous reports confirms that a disproportionate number of children assigned to these schools are Afro-American or Hispanic. Finally, and not surprisingly, these schools have a disproportionate number of teachers who are not fully certified and have less than five years of classroom experience (Viteritti and Kosar, 2000)

History of the NYC Teaching Fellows from August 2000 to Present

The publication of Viteritti and Kosar's Report in July 2000 was coincidental and might have contributed to the decision of the State Board of Regents to approve alternative certification programs and to allocate the necessary funds. Applicants to the NYC Teaching Fellows Program were required to have a B average in their undergraduate degree; they were then further evaluated through a series of interviews and a required 10 minute lesson on any elementary subject. (personal experience) Because of the overwhelming response, 2300 applicants for 250 positions, the pilot program was expanded to 324 Fellows. (Goodnough, 2000)

Of the original 324 Fellows, 53 resigned for a variety of reasons, though the overwhelming majority cited issues in the classroom, particularly class management, as opposed to unspecified "personal issues." For the second year, the program was expanded by 400% as 1200 Fellows signed on to become classroom teachers in September 2001. (Goodnough, 2001) Chancellor Levy quickly proclaimed the program a success because the majority of fellows passed two out three certification exams on their first try, with little preparation. In comparison, the failure rate was 60% for all others who attempted these tests. (Goodnough, 2000)

The NYCTF Program is just one of many teacher recruitment programs in NYC, which include Teach for America, District Satellite Recruitment Program, Student Teacher Initiative, Puerto Rico Recruitment, the Teaching Opportunity Program Scholarship (TOPS), and International Recruitment. (www.teachny.com/inc_intro.html.) The NY Teaching Fellows program distinguishes itself as the city's first attempt at a large scale alternative certification

program distinguishes itself as the city's first attempt at a large scale alternative certification program, which, hopefully, will help to counteract the projected teacher shortage crisis.

Alternative Certification

At the time of the NYCTF's inception, New York was one of only ten states which did not provide a structured path to usher new people, particularly those who lack the educational course work, into a teaching career.(Keller, 2000) Before considering what the Board of Regents meant by "alternative certification programs," one must realize that the process of licensing teachers varies radically from state to state. Some states require undergraduate education courses, some offer a fifth year program, and others require a master's degree in education. Requirements may vary according to discipline and grade level, and may include service as a student teacher and passage of standardized tests, the most common being the National Teachers Examination (NTE). Many states, including New York, California, Florida, Arizona and Michigan, have adopted their own series of certification tests. (Feistritzer, 1994)

These testing changes required by different states are generally considered an attempt to upgrade the quality of teachers; however, education expert Gregorian advocates national certification as the most effective method for improving standards. Such a certification program could be developed by a national commission that would not only be responsible for maintaining standards and producing standardized exams, but also for developing a model system for measuring teachers' skills and performance. As Gregorian explains, "Accountability is essential for only if teachers are able to push themselves past mediocrity will the standing of the profession itself improve in the public's eyes." (Gregorian, 2001)

Keeping in mind the great variation in certification requirements in different states, Feistritzer outlines the history of alternative certification from 1984, when New Jersey first enacted legislation for an alternative route to bring non-traditional candidates into teaching, as opposed to simply issuing emergency certificates. She and Chester do an enormous service in establishing their Classification of Alternative Certification. (Feistritzer and Chester, 1991) Their listing ranges from Class A to Class I, with only Class A and B fulfilling requirements for what Feistritzer feels are real alternative certification programs. (Feistritzer, 1994)

The criteria of Class A are as follows:

- The program has been designed for the explicit purpose of attracting talented individuals who already have at least a Bachelor's degree in any field other than education.

individuals who already have at least a Bachelor's degree in any field other than education.

• The program involves teaching with a trained mentor and formal instruction on theory and practice of teaching scheduled either during the school year or sometimes in the summer. The program is not restricted to shortages, secondary grade levels or subject areas. (Feistritzer and Chester, 1991)

Class B alternative certification routes have also been designed specifically to bring talented individuals who already have at least a bachelor's degree into teaching. They involve specifically designed mentoring and formal instruction. However, at this point, Class A and B differ, since in class B, either these states restrict their programs to shortages, secondary grade levels, and/or subject areas. (Feistritzer and Chester, 1991) Their classification, although nine years old, has not been replaced and is still a quite useful tool in evaluating alternative certification programs

Feistritzer's statistics are old but still telling. From 1985-1990, only 20,000 persons had been certified nationally through a "true" (Class A and B) alternative certification route rising to 50,000 by 1993. In comparison, in 1989-90, there were a total of 140,500 newly qualified to teach via alternative certification. Even without recent numbers, these dated statistics, clearly demonstrate tremendous growth of interest in alternative certification methods. She contends that there is a huge untapped supply of qualifying college graduates, who are without high paying white collar jobs, and that in 1990, 20% were in jobs that did not even require a college degree. (Feistritzer, 1994)

Additionally, although eight years old, her findings refute both the scale and calamitous nature of projected teacher shortage, though she concedes that there are shortages in the inner cities and in certain subject areas. Unfortunately, she believes that alternative certification programs, one and all, have not been studied seriously; instead, they are summarily criticized and dismissed as "quick fixes" to the threats of teacher shortages. Few who reviewed her work bothered to take into account the fact that many states were not only seeking ways to ward off shortages, but to find better routes for preparing and licensing teachers than the traditional college approved routes designed primarily for persons pursuing an undergraduate degree.

> "While empirical research on the effectiveness of alternative teacher certification programs is scant and considered flawed by many, there is no doubt that alternative routes for preparing and licensing teachers are attracting large numbers of highly qualified, talented and enthusiastic individuals to the teaching profession. Most are highly

> educated, life-experienced adults who want to teach and improve the nation's education system. They will do whatever is necessary in terms of preparation in order to accomplish their ends." (Feistritzer, 1994, p.137)

The General Debate Regarding Alternative Certification Programs

Feistritzer's findings indicate that alternative certification programs (Class A and B) could be a practical solution to the problems of teacher shortages, especially in the inner cities, and the need for high quality teachers. However, alternative certification programs remain the subject of a great deal of controversy among leading educators today. The general debate regarding "alternate certification" is well typified by that between Kopp of Teach for America and Darling-Hammond, current Stanford professor of Education and former Russell Professor of Columbia Teachers' College, whose philosophies represent the extreme viewpoints on this issue.

Kopp, a Princeton graduate in 1989, founded the program, Teach for America (TFA), which has, in its ten years of existence, selected 5000 college graduates, to teach in under served communities and rural settings. TFA selects only 20% of its applicants, essentially on the basis of leadership skills, and requires no training in education. To be fair, there is a pre-service training program, and some form of ongoing support system. Those selected must commit two years of service to expand opportunities for children in low income communities. After 10 years, statistics show that 90% meet the two year commitment, 37% are still classroom teachers, while another 21% remain in the field of education, either as grad school professors, administrators or work in leadership roles in educational organizations.(Kopp,2000)

It is hardly surprising that the Peace Corps was Kopp's model for TFA. When it began, the most expected the program to fail due to financial instability, organizational chaos, and the group received scathing criticism for being a bunch of inexperienced do-gooders. (Interview:Corp Beliefs, 2001) It has survived, even succeeded, largely due to the support of local school communities. Additionally, 90% of principals rated program members as good or excellent. (Kopp, 2000)

Objectively, Teach for America's retention rates are no worse than those of other new teachers in failing schools, although neither are very encouraging. The program's selection of only elite college graduates with strong leadership skills, an altruistic devotion to community service as well as an idealistic spirit (and perhaps, one eye thinking about the bottom line of their

service as well as an idealistic spirit (and perhaps, one eye thinking about the bottom line of their resume) makes her initiative incapable of supplying large numbers of new teachers and thus unable to sufficiently address the extent of the teacher shortage problem, though her program is indisputably well-meaning. Kopp herself stated that the aim of the program was not to fill the teacher shortage, rather simply to provide inner city children with exposure to excellent teachers with leadership skills, with the hope of creating a new crop of leaders from within. (Interview: Corp Beliefs, 2001)

Even in light of TFA's small-scale success, Darling-Hammond has taken aim right at TFA. According to Darling-Hammond, TFA's inadequate training methods and disregard for a teaching and learning knowledge base continues a long tradition of devaluing urban students and deprofessionalizing teaching. (Darling-Hammond, 1994) In an interview, Kopp is asked point blank

> **Q:** Since 1994, Linda Darling Hammond has attacked Teach for America for, among other things, placing unprepared teachers in the classroom. Why has she been so antagonistic toward you and your organization?
> **A:** Initially, I thought it had to do with the fact that here's this person,namely me, right out of college with this idea- I would have been somewhat annoyed myself. I wrote it off because of that.But it's gone on for so long I'm sue that can't be it. I think she fundamentally believes in a different approach-that all teachers should go through campus-based teacher education programs. (Interview Corps,2001, p.56)

Darling-Hammond launches a similarly styled attack on a paper written by Kate Walsh for the Abel Foundation, that purports that there is no credible research that supports the use of teacher certification as a regulatory barrier to teaching. (Walsh, 2001) Walsh dismisses the idea that knowledge about teaching as a discipline effects teacher performance since there is no real improvement in student performance under the tutelage of certified teachers. Darling-Hammond accuses her of ignoring evidence, making unfounded claims, misrepresenting research and using double standards while doing research. (Darling-Hammond, 2001)

Darling-Hammond summarizes her own general philosophy of teacher training and recruitment. (Darling-Hammond, 2000) She feels that back door routes into short term training programs, adopted by most states as a way to alleviate teacher shortages, actually exacerbates the problem. That is because with only a few weeks of preparation before entering the classroom,

they learn far less than traditionally trained teachers. 60% of teachers from back door programs leave by their third year, compared with 30% in traditional teaching programs and only 10-15% in extended five year programs. (Darling-Hammond, 2000)

In 1997, Darling-Hammond made the dismal assessment that most schools and teachers cannot provide the kind of teaching the new standards demand because they lack know-how and organizational support. The policy challenge ahead is to develop schools' capacity to teach challenging content to diverse learners by ensuring teachers' access to knowledge, in order for teachers to be effective. New organizational reforms need to be developed that can support more powerful teaching and learning. (Darling-Hammond, 1997)

Interestingly, in her bleak assessment, she does not distinguish between traditional and alternative certification programs when labeling teachers unable to provide the kind of teaching that the new standards demand. (Darling-Hammond, 1997). One year later she is a bit more circumspect, when stating that efforts to professionalize teaching in recent years have contrasted sharply with regulatory initiatives that deprofessionalize the occupation and act of teaching. (Darling-Hammond,1988) "Choices made now between better regulations and better teachers will determine the shape of education in years to come". (Darling-Hammond 1988, p.10)

Darling-Hammond is not alone in her insistence on a solid background in education for teachers. Haselkorn, another renowned educator, wrote "that the practice of recruiting teachers into the classroom, often armed with a bachelor's degree and as little as five weeks of "boot camp" preparation is not the answer to a growing supply problem. "They shortchange kids, sell teacher quality short, and obscure the real nature of the nation's teaching challenge." (Haskelkorn, 2001, p.34) He contends that the knowledge and skills necessary to help struggling learners doesn't always come with an undergraduate credential or a track record of success in another career. Also, these shortcuts perpetuate the myth that good teachers are born and not made, thus undermining the current system of teacher education. (Haselkorn, 2001)

He also echoes Darling-Hammond in his contention that the quick fix which appears so attractive in the short run, will, over the long haul, bear too high a cost. Higher attrition rates, and the ensuing revolving-door recruitment will further destabilize failing schools and resources that could be targeted to fix root causes of teacher shortages by diverting salary and improvements in working conditions. (Haselkorn, 2001)

Darling-Hammond's one-note theme, that teachers require solid training in education, is not an adequate justification for dismissing the better (Class A and B) of "alternative

certification programs" which make great efforts to provide candidates with solid educational backgrounds, even including latest educational theories, mentoring programs and team teaching. Fortunately, Haselkorn shows greater objectivity when he points out that there are alternative routes to teaching that don't sacrifice quality to expediency, but do provide time-shortened and innovative routes to meeting the very high standards we should expect of all teachers. He gives Northwestern University's Alternative Teacher Certification Program as an example of a successful program. It consists of an initial eight-week intensive summer study period that focuses on educational theory, pedagogy and practice teaching. During the year, "interns" work as full-time teachers in the Chicago public schools, while attending evening classes and being monitored by both university faculty members and public school teachers. A final phase of he preparation consists for a comprehensive evaluation of the interns' academic work and teaching performance. (Haselkorn, 2001)

The most encouraging aspect of Haselkorn's remarks is that, unlike Ms. Darling-Hammond he sees examples of "alternative certification programs" that appear to be working. Moreover, the Northwestern Program sounds similar to the NYCTF Program, especially after changes following Cohort 1 (the group of fellows that began teaching September, 2000), which was only given one month of summer training prior to placement in the classroom.

Haselkorn highlights the importance of having mentoring programs, linking recruits with well-selected mentors, within their own school. To be successful, there needs to be a reasonable mentor-to-novice ratio, mentors need to be specially compensated for their duties and adequate time must be set aside in the school week for mentor and novice to meet. Such programs can significantly reduce attrition rates and accelerate classroom confidence, competence and effectiveness. While all new teachers can benefit from mentoring, it is especially important in alternative certification programs. Haselkorn says it best, "It is absolutely true that individuals from other careers can bring talents that should be put to use in our schools. But that doesn't mean we should relax standards. If anything, we need to raise them." (Haselkorn, 2001)

Consensus about the importance of improving education

The consensus among educators and average Americans is that standards for the graduates of these programs must be high. The former group expresses its ideas well in a serious two year study conducted in 1996 by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, composed of 27 renowned educators (including Darling-Hammond) and chaired by then

Future, composed of 27 renowned educators (including Darling-Hammond) and chaired by then Governor, James Hunt of Virginia. Briefly, the findings were as follows: 1) what teachers know and can do is the most important influence on what students learn; 2) recruiting, preparing and retaining good teachers is the most important strategy for improving schools; and 3) school reform cannot succeed unless it focuses on creating conditions in which teachers can teach and teach well. (What Matters Most, 1996)

The Committee made five recommendations: 1)get serious about standards for teachers and students; 2) reinvent teacher preparation and professional development opportunities; 3) fix teacher recruitment and put qualified teachers in each classroom; 4) encourage and reward teacher knowledge and skill; and 5) create schools organized for teacher and student success. (What Matters Most, 1996)

Likewise, the attitudes of the American public, are well summarized in a nationwide survey of 2501 adults. (Haselkorn and Harris, 2001) They determine the following: 1) Americans unequivocally support the guarantee of free public education and consider improvement in student behavior, achievement, and academic performance essential; 2) The majority of the public believe all students are capable of learning demanding academic material and that hard work pays off in higher achievement; 3) Declining percentages of Americans believe that educational opportunities are shared equally by minorities and the poor and 4) Americans consider well-qualified teachers in classrooms, safe classrooms, and parental involvement critical in improving student achievement.

Furthermore, Americans believe that a qualified teacher must have classroom management skills, extensive knowledge of the subject material and and understanding of how to teach and how students learn.(Haselkorn and Harris, 2001)

Salary and Professionalism : Two Key Issues in any Discussion of Teacher Recruitment

While politicians and the public both support improving teacher quality, there has been a general reluctance to pay teachers salary commensurate with their skill level. Compensation must be on a professional level, whereas, in reality, most states pay teachers less than any other occupation requiring a bachelor's or master's degree. It is a measure of the profession's weakness that the only way most teachers can earn a good salary and grow professionally is to become an administrator. (Gregorian, 2001)

administrator. (Gregorian, 2001)

Finally, the lack of perceived professionalism of teaching, is another issue which must be reformed, if we are to create a profession of high quality teachers who will retain their jobs. Gregorian believes that the the shortage of professional advocacy on behalf of teachers starts right with their own unions which devote most of their energies to improving salaries and working conditions. By and large, unions have failed to secure the professional prerogatives of teachers, namely autonomy, flexibility and freedom to innovate. He feels that unions need to be more concerned with pushing for more rigorous intellectual content in teacher education and increased opportunity for professional development. (Gregorian, 2001)

In order to help people entering the profession, the practice of giving new teachers the toughest assignments should be abandoned; instead, they should be their choice of schools, along with reduced teaching assignments and mentoring. Furthermore, market realities must be faced and the considerable competition teacher in certain academic specialties, like math and science, should be reflected by higher salaries for those entering those subject areas. (Gregorian, 2001)

Thesis Questionnaire

New York is the forty-first state to institute an alternative certification program. Since NYC, especially in the SURR schools, is so troubled by low levels of teacher certification, there was sufficient motivation to create a Class A alternative certification program: the NYC Fellows Program. (Feistritzer and Chester, 1991) For this study, questionnaires were distributed to only 46 Cohort 1 Fellows at Lehman College. The purpose of the questionnaire is to evaluate the NYCTF program in terms of strengths and weaknesses, especially, concentrating on where support was most and least forthcoming. Additionally, an attempt was made to ask the Fellows, now with almost two years firsthand experience, for suggestions to improve education quality in the SURR schools, and to gauge possible retention rates for the NYCTFs.

Questionnaire Results

Thirty-one questionnaires were returned with the following results:

Question 1: How would you describe your situation prior to becoming a NYCTF?

25 % responded that they were recent college graduates. 47% stated that they were employed earning a higher income and 28% stated that they were employed and earning a lower income.

Question 2- Had the respondent ever considered teaching prior to becoming a NYCTF.

23% had never given teaching any thought before. 15% had considered becoming a teacher but the pay and status was too low. 47% had considered being a teacher but lacked the necessary educational course work. 15% responded that they always wanted to be a teacher.

Question 3- Respondents were asked to rank their three most serious problems from a given list.

By far the most serious problem encountered the first year teaching was classroom management issues which appeared among the top three problems for 87% respondents. It was the #1 problem for 67%, #2 problem for 10%, and #3 problem for 10%. 54% of respondents had reading below grade level and math skills below grade level on their lists, only 15% ranked reading below grade level as their number one problem, while 8% ranked math skills below grade level as their most serious problem..24 % had reading below grade level as their number 2 problem and 15% as their number 3 problem. 15% had poor math skills as their number two problem. 31% had poor math skills as their number three problem. 46 % respondents stated that they overwhelmed by school work and taking courses among their top three problems, but it was problem number one for just 8%. Lack of support from administration made it among the top three problems for 30% of respondents, ranking as number 2 for 23 % and number 3 for 7%. 23% respondents listed financial hardship, beyond what they had anticipated, among their top three problems but it was number one for just 8%. It ranked number three for 15%. Fourteen listed hostility from supervisors or other teachers and it was the number one problem for 3%.

Question 4- The statement was made that the Teachers' Center was a great source of support.

23% listed the Teacher Center as great source of support. 20 % said it provided some support. 20 % stated it provided not much support and 27% stated it provided no support at all.

Question 5- The statement was made that one's mentor was a great source of support.

A mentor was considered a great source of support by 21% of respondents, somewhat of a

A mentor was considered a great source of support by 21% of respondents, somewhat of a source of support by 36% of respondents and not much of a support source by 43%.

Question 6- The statement was made that the principal, assistant principals and staff developers were a great source of support.

The principal, assistant principals and staff developers were considered a great source of support by only 7% respondents. 43% considered them to be somewhat supportive,28%considered them not much support at all and 22% said they were absolutely no support at all.

Question 7- The statement was made that one's fellow teachers, with their greater experience, were a great source of support.

Other more experience teachers at your school were considered a great source of support by 20% of responders, somewhat support by 27%, not much support by 33% and absolutely no support at all by 20%.

Question 8- The statement was made that other Teaching Fellows at your school, although inexperienced, were a great source of support.

Respondents felt that the other Teaching Fellows in their school, though inexperienced, provided a great source of support (43% responders), somewhat of a source of support (36%), and were hardly any support (21%).

Question 9- The statement was made that the personnel who worked directly for the NYCTF Program at the BOE and CUNY were a great source of support.

Personnel for the NYC Fellows Program, both at the BOE and at CUNY, were considered a great source of support by 27% of respondents, somewhat of a source of support by 13% of respondents, hardly much support by 27 % of respondents, and no support, whatsoever by 33% of respondents.

Question 10- The statement was made that the course work at Lehman was helpful in a practical way in the classroom.

The course work at CUNY was felt to provide practical and useful information by 29% of respondents, somewhat useful information by 21% of respondents, not very useful information

respondents, somewhat useful information by 21% of respondents, not very useful information by 29% of respondents, and essentially useless information by 21% of respondents.

Question 11- Whether the respondent ever thought of quitting.

35% responded that they thought about quitting daily, 7% responded that they thought about it a lot at first but not much now, 15% responded that they rarely think about quitting because they are committed to teaching, and 43% stated that they rarely think of quitting since once they would become certified, they could reevaluate options and possibly teach in the suburbs.

Question 12- The statement that you began to feel better last year because, and asked them to rank their top three reasons taken from a list.

The number one reason for beginning to feel a little better last year was seeing actual improvement in your students (42%), seeing yourself develop some classroom management skills (29%) and knowing June was right around the corner and you would make it through the year (29%). The number two reason for beginning to feel a little better was getting a rare compliment from your principal or assistant principal (29%), seeing yourself developing some classroom management skills (29%), and knowing June was right around the corner and you would make it through the year (42%). The number three reason for feeling better was a complement from your principal or assistant principal (25%), seeing some improvement in students (33%), seeing yourself developing management skills (25%) and knowing June was right around the corner and your would make it through the year (17%).

Question 13- The respondent was asked to rank what he/she felt would be the most important three improvements in their job.

The number one answer for the greatest improvement in the job would be a raise of at least $7000 (73%). It appeared as one of the top reasons for 93% of responders, with 7% ranking it number two and 13% ranking it number three. Becoming certified was one of the top three improvements for 60%. (It ranked as number one for 11%, number two for 33%, and number three for 56% who chose this answer). The third most common answer was a move to the suburbs where salaries would be higher and students more motivated. 50% chose this as one of their improvements, with half of those selecting it as the most important improvement and half as the number two improvements. The other choices had far less significant responses.

improvements. The other choices had far less significant responses.

Question 14- Respondents were asked where they thought they would be in ten years. , 10% saw themselves still working in a SURR or under served school in NYC, 29% saw themselves still teaching in the city but not in a SURR school, 40% saw themselves teaching in the suburbs and 21% saw themselves back at their old job.

Question 15- Respondents were asked to finish the statement: I will be a great teacher in .....

For the answer of when I will be come a great teacher, 35% responded that they already were, 25% responded within that they will become one in two years, 25% responded within five years and 15% responded that they never would since great teachers are born, not made.

Question 16- Respondents were asked to rank their top three reasons for remaining NYC Teachers.

Those factors most important for keeping respondents in the NYC School System were found to be the love of teaching .66% listed it among the top three; of those 70 % chose it as their number one factor, 10% as their number two factor, and 20% as their number three factor.

An even higher 72% chose the daily hours and summers off as a top factor; of those making this selection, 36% felt it to be the most important, 45% felt it to be the second most important factor, and 19% felt it to be the third most important factor. 40% felt that job security was an important factor and 33% who chose it chose it as the number one factor; the remaining 67% chose it as the number three factor. Finally, 40% also chose the benefits as one of their three most important factors. Within that group, 50% of those made it their second choice and 50% made it their third choice.

Question 17- This was essentially an open question by Mayor Bloomberg for improvements from those in the trenches, bearing in mind that money was tight, and he wanted the most "bang for the buck." .

The answers I received were thoughtful, some well-known, others, more novel, and I will itemize them below with the numeric reference reflecting the number of times this suggestion was raised.

- salary increases (22)

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- do away with canned curriculum such as SFA in District 85 (5)
- provide basic school supplies such as paper, notebooks, pencils (3)
- improve parental involvement (4)
- provide real remedial services to students below grade level. Especially, early intervention in the lowest grades K-2, with special intervention programs. (2)
- provides paraprofessionals for all grades K-2 to make sure basics are getting down. (3)
- use of more paraprofessionals, in general (4)
- Reading Recovery made available to more students.
- more phonics
- less emphasis on bulletin boards (5)
- Stop atmosphere of constant surveillance.
- Remove scripted lessons and remove poor teachers. Let those who can teach, teach.
- Maintain accountability for student behavior. (5) or as one respondent so aptly said, get those 10% of students with such poor behavior out of the classroom, so the other 90% who want to learn can.
- Maintain small class size. (7)
- More management training for administrators and more professional development for teachers.
- Stop all the meetings between administrators, principals and supervisors with the BOE, District Office and among themselves. Have them become more involved with their own school, where it's heading and how it's teachers are faring.
- Provide an extra $300 for cluster science teachers in addition to teacher's choice, to help cover all the cost of hands-on material.

Conclusions

Many conclusions can be drawn about the NYC Teaching Fellows Program, even considering the small number of respondents (31) and the distribution of the questionnaire to only Cohort 1 Fellows at Lehman College, and, in spite of the fact that the program is undergoing self-improvement. Still, the NYCTF clearly fits Class A (Feistritzer and Chester, 1991) as an example of a well-thought out and well-funded effort by New York to develop a quality alternative certification program.

alternative certification program.

Those who handed in the questionnaire will no doubt go on to graduation and certification since they have persisted this long. In this respect, the program is capable of providing a large percentage of certified teachers, one of its main goals, through the selection process of highly motivated and hard-working candidates, along with attrition of all others. There is no question that the course work has been rigorous, and candidates for masters degrees, at least at Lehman, receive a full masters in education, with no "mickey-mouse" aspects, obtained while teaching for two years in very difficult schools with frequent observations by AP's, Lehman personnel, coupled with parent conferences and all other standard demands on a teacher.

The answers to **Question 1** reflect how idealistic a significant number of the fellows were coming into the program, since a full 47% left jobs with greater pay. **Question 2** gives credence to the concept of alternative certification programs since a full 47% had considered teaching but lacked the course work to receive a standard certification.

The most difficult overall problem for most of the respondents was classroom management and while, it is not possible to prepare for many of the situations the new teacher will meet, there are now changes in the Fellows Program that address this by putting Fellows into summer school sessions so they have more first hand experience dealing with children. Also, low reading levels and poor math skills were major problems for the Fellows, underscoring the belief by many that the newest teachers should not be filling positions in SURR schools, but rather these difficult positions should be entrusted to more experienced teachers. However, this allocation is so unlikely to change that the real hope is that the new Fellows will improve and stay on at the SURR schools, ultimately improving conditions at their schools. Undoubtedly, this would take some time; still, from some questionnaire answers discussed below, it seems that the number of Fellows who dream of moving to suburban schools or improved city schools is high. Therefore, while Fellows may remain as NYC or NYS certified teachers, it is unlikely that they will remain in SURR schools, considering only 10% respond that they think they will still be in one in ten years. In fact, seeing certification as a "ticket to the suburbs" was a common theme among answers to the Questionnaire.

Sources of support varied from Fellow to Fellow but there were enough mechanisms in place that most managed to find some person, to whom they could turn for guidance. The greatest potential sources were the mentors, which was expected by Haselkorn, the Teaching

greatest potential sources were the mentors, which was expected by Haselkorn, the Teaching Centers, and other Teaching Fellows at their school. This last choice is of particular interest, since other Fellows have little educational experience, and shows that support is often emotional in nature, in addition to being informational. Less useful as sources of support were the principals, AP's, staff developers, fellow teachers and even those employees who worked directly for the Teaching Fellows Program. What I found particularly interesting was how far that small unexpected compliment went toward making a Fellow feel better about their jobs, and how rare, such kudos are. It would be a useful for administrators to try to give some positive reinforcement to a new teacher, however, in my school, the administration appears sternest, just at those times when a kind word would work wonders.

The course work the Fellows attend after work, was considered only somewhat useful. It could be construed as surprising that they find it useful at all. After all, on top of being after work graduate courses, often the subject had almost nothing to do with a particular Fellow's individual experience. Often, it is only in hindsight that one can realize course work provided information useful at a later date.

No statistic speaks more to how difficult the Fellows' work is than that 35% thought about quitting daily, but didn't. Now, 58% rarely think of quitting; This 58% is composed of two groups, one group of 15% who never considered quitting because of their strong commitment to teaching, along with another more pragmatic group consisting of 43% of respondents, who feel they can review their future options once they become fully certified.

The most common sources of encouragement for the Fellows was seeing improvement in one's students (42%), seeing the development of some classroom management skills (29%) and knowing that June was around the corner and you would make it through the year (29%) The idealism seen in the answers to **Question 1** seem to slowly morph into the more cynical, yet realistic, answers of **Question 13 and 14** , although, as mentioned previously, in **Question 16**, 66% of all respondents did list "love of teaching" as a reason to stay.

It is not surprising, nor any true breach of idealistic values, to be keenly interested in a raise of $7000, since this still means a starting salary below $40,000, which is comparatively low for the education level of the Fellows. Still, for the number two and three potential improvements in the job, respondents chose certification and a move to the suburbs where salaries would be better and students more motivated. Sadly, by **Question 14**, only 10% still envisioned themselves at SURR or historically underserved schools. 28% saw themselves still

envisioned themselves at SURR or historically underserved schools. 28% saw themselves still teaching in NYC but not at SURR school. A full 40% had their eyes on suburban schools, while 22% thought of returning to their former job. At least, 78% still believed that they would remain in teaching.

In **Question 15**, it is interesting that 37% of respondents already considered themselves great teachers, an opinion which might raise some doubts and sound presumptuous, though, unquestionably, they have some great attributes as teachers. Most feel that within 2-5 years they will become great teachers, while some, 15% with a more reflective, philosophical bent, feel that they probably never would be great teachers, since great teachers are born, not made. Generally, it is an advantage for new recruits to have an over-inflated impression of their skills, for self-confidence always helps at any level, especially in a situation that can feel as defeating as teaching in a SURR school. While the 15% who feel that greatness is not learnable may be right, it is still important to aim for this goal, since it is always possible to hone skills and improve performance. Believing too strongly in the importance of inborn skills, makes teacher professional training somewhat superfluous and can cause some teachers to underachieve.

Idealism and realism can be totally compatible as seen in the answers to **Question 16**. For example, 66% of teachers chose love of teaching as one of three reasons to stay in the NYC School System. An even higher 72% chose the daily hours and summers off as one of the main factors keeping them in the city.

Finally, **Question 17** raises many fine points, but, it is meaningful that 22 of the 31 Fellows chose to write for higher salaries, especially since this is one of the simplest problems to solve.

Final Notes

Until there is a rebirth of primary education programs at universities, alternative certification programs, including NYC Teaching Fellows, are here to stay as the means of providing quality certified teachers to under served schools. In Cohort I, many high quality candidates who will become certified teachers either this year or next, depending upon the need to finish up some undergraduate courses, which is on its own an impressive feat, since so many teachers linger in the system uncertified. The question remains whether they can be retained, somehow, in the NYC School System at all, let alone in SURR schools, and The Questionnaire

indicates that this is unlikely, and that the continuing exodus of teachers from failing schools will continue and thus this alternative certification program may fall short of this goal. In fact, the $25,000 that NYC has spent on every fellow for their masters degree may, in the end, be entirely wasted as graduates of the Fellows Program follow the course of others before them and leave the SURR schools, in worsening condition, and increasing in number.

Obvious fixes, such as salary increases, money to decrease class sizes and provide the enrichment needed to get students in early grades basic literacy skills are needed. Whether it means team teaching, more paras, and certainly, dedicated parental involvement. Additionally, administrators are in dire need to be taught skills to deal with young teaching recruits including Fellows. One of the most interesting findings of the questionnaire was how important it was for new teachers to be acknowledged by their principals and APs.

Gregorian's ideas that salaries must be increased as must the need for certification, since this alone will increase the professionalism of teaching, making it a more appealing future, is confirmed by the Fellows' responses. (Gregorian, 2001) Also, the responses support both Gregorian and Haselkorn and Louis who believe that good teachers must be rewarded and teachers who lack skills must acquire them, or leave the system. (Haselkorn, 2001) Subjects, in higher demand, such as math and science, especially at the secondary level, should be compensated at a higher rate.(Gregorian, 2001) Teaching must be made more dynamic with more professional development and more responsibility given to the individual teacher. (Gregorian, 2001)

There needs to be a means of dealing with the problem of disruptive students, so that the rest of the class has the opportunity to learn. Finally, teachers need to be less jealous of their turf and more willing to share with others to create an atmosphere of helping and sharing. There needs to be a feeling of true camaraderie, increasing retention and inspiring the process of rebuilding a school together, and an understanding that thy is not an overnight process.

Still, these answers are well known already, yet things have only gotten worse. Ultimately, unless a severe teacher surplus develops as unemployment rises, real financial incentives must be considered to keep the Fellows from leaving SURR schools for other NYC and suburban schools.

Down to the Nitty-Gritty

So, let's be honest and admit that teaching in SURR schools almost resembles "combat duty" and true financial perks must be put into place to retain the Fellows there, for

"combat duty" and true financial perks must be put into place to retain the Fellows there, for that is critical in order to end to the massive teacher turnover.

"Combat duty" implies combat pay and perhaps, teachers at schools designated as SURR should have a pay increase above and beyond what the city teachers are getting and I do not mean the extra 15% pay given in Chancellor's District Schools for a day that is 15% longer. Other financial incentives could be tax breaks, help with school loans for new teachers, housing incentives, including low mortgages with less cash down. Perhaps, there should be one less work period for the teacher daily, meaning more staff, since school would not end early. Otherwise, it can already be seen by reading the responses to the Questionnaire that Fellows will drift to better city schools, suburban schools or back to their old job.

In one respect, the NYCTF Program appears to be a partial success, in that there will be high levels of certification, but the program will ultimately be a failure if retention of Fellows in SURR Schools cannot be achieved. For this to happen, we will need to have some of the above incentives included. All the perks suggested above for teaching in SURR school would be earned and if a teacher is not "pulling his/her weight" then, he/she can be helped, given mentoring and professional education, but, if there is ultimately no improvement in performance, asked to leave the SURR school, losing all financial perks attained. In conclusion, financial incentives will probably be necessary for both the goals of certification and retention in SURR schools to be met by most of the NYCTF's; but only time will tell, and the program is still young.

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